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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000136

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STATE FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA'S JANUARY 19 MEETING WITH ACTING
PRESIDENT NINO BURJANADZE

Classified By: Ambassador John Tefft, reason 1.4(b), and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Acting President Nino Burjanadze told DAS Matthew Bryza at a January 19 meeting that she planned to continue talks with representatives of the opposition and also pledged to take steps to improve election procedures prior to the spring 2008 parliamentary elections. Burjanadze was critical of some members of the opposition, whom she called "irresponsible," but remained guardedly optimistic about the prospects for the further democratic development of Georgia. She concluded that with careful, measured steps by both the government and the constructive members of the opposition, it would be possible to use the events of the fall and the elections to strengthen Georgian democracy. End Summary.

Analysis of Presidential Election

12. (C) In a January 19 meeting with DAS Bryza and Ambassador Tefft, Burjanadze promised to address all concerns about irregularities during the presidential election. She argued that it was difficult to know which problems were genuine and which were exaggerated, adding that even Georgian NGOs had conceded that the violations they had uncovered would not have changed the outcome of the election. Burjanadze also thanked the United States for its statement supporting the outcome of the election.

13. (C) Burjanadze admitted surprise that Saakashvili got only 53 percent of the vote, despite heavy campaign efforts, and disappointment that United Opposition candidate Levan Gacheciliadze got 25 percent without putting forward a realistic program for the country. She also said she was somewhat upset that seven percent of Georgians voted for oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili even after revelations that he was plotting the overthrow of the government. She agreed with Ambassador Tefft's assessment that most votes for the opposition candidates were "protest" votes against President Saakashvili and did not necessarily reflect popular support for the opposition.

Prognosis for Talks With the Opposition

14. (C) Burjanadze accused the opposition of planning in advance to proclaim the presidential election fraudulent. She similarly complained that it would prove difficult to sustain a productive political dialogue about the country's future until opposition leaders acknowledge the legitimacy of President Saakashvili's re-election. DAS Bryza noted that the President's willingness to participate in dialogue with the opposition would also be a key factor. Burjanadze agreed that there were limits to what she alone could accomplish in discussions with the opposition; a more productive dialogue would require the direct engagement of President Saakashvili.

15. (C) Burjanadze predicted, however, that the United

Opposition would soon split, with many of its leaders adopting a more constructive approach to political dialogue with the government. She singled out Republican Party leader David Usupashvili as such a constructive force and credited him with helping defuse the tension that had flared right after the presidential election.

Heading Toward the Parliamentary Election

¶6. (C) Burjanadze admitted that one cause of the current political crisis in Georgia was the large majority the ruling National Movement holds in the sitting parliament, which led the government to sometimes ignore legitimate concerns of the opposition. The challenge in the spring parliamentary election, she said, would be for the National Movement to retain a stable bloc in parliament, while the opposition gains enough seats to give it a substantial voice. She also expressed concern that Georgia avoid a return to the fractionated and ineffective parliaments of the 1990s, where a number of small parties held seats and blocked forward movement on many issues.

¶7. (C) To achieve a positive outcome in the parliamentary elections, Burjanadze suggested changes in the election code to allow more transparent and neutral dispute resolution. The current election commissions, divided six-to-six between the National Movement and the opposition, are ineffective and should be professionalized, she said. She cautioned that not much could be done before the parliamentary elections, but pledged to take some steps in this direction quickly.

¶8. (C) Burjanadze noted that the highly polarized political environment would hamper efforts to improve election procedures. It would be nearly impossible to find people to

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implement them who would be regarded as sufficiently independent and politically acceptable by all sides. Burjanadze cited the example of Kublashvili, the Chairman of the Supreme Court. Some opposition leaders regard him as insufficiently independent. When asked, however, these same leaders cannot name a more acceptable candidate. Ambassador Tefft suggested that an influential Georgian recently returned from an extended stay in Europe or the United States might be viewed as an independent and neutral arbiter by all parties.

¶9. (C) Comment: Burjanadze's steady leadership and willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition played a key role in helping Georgia negotiate the difficult period since November 7. As she noted, however, there are limits to what she can achieve alone. The opposition has told us it could not meet President Saakashvili directly until after the parliamentary elections. It will be important that the government use the time until the parliamentary elections to fix as many problems as possible that were uncovered by the OSCE, ODIHR, and other election monitoring missions. End Comment.

¶10. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this message.
TEFFT